CLAIMS

1. A transaction card fabrication control system comprising:

a card reader that reads an identifier from a plurality of transaction cards in a group, the identifier uniquely identifying each transaction card from other transaction cards in the group and facilitating an association of a transaction involving each transaction card with an issuee;

a card transport that moves transaction cards relative to the card reader;

a card presence sensor that detects the presence of transaction cards moved by the card transport; and

a controller that compares identifiers read from a set of transaction cards by the card reader to a stored list of identifiers for the transaction cards and generates an approval report to release the set of transaction cards for packaging only if all identifiers read from the set of transaction cards match corresponding identifiers in the stored list.

2. The system of claim 1, wherein the controller generates an approval report only if the identifiers read from the set of transactions cards match corresponding identifiers in the stored list and if the identifiers were read from the set of transaction cards in a sequence that matches a sequence in the stored list.

3. The system of claim 1, wherein the controller builds a temporary file of identifiers read from the set of transaction cards, inserts the temporary file into a database, and compares the identifiers in the temporary file to identifiers in the stored list.

4. The system of claim 1, wherein the approval report includes a printed form that indicates the transaction cards in the set all have identifiers matching a stored list of identifiers.

5. The system of claim 1, wherein the group of transaction cards is logically organized into a plurality of sets of transaction cards, the controller stores a plurality of lists of identifiers each corresponding to an associated set of transaction cards, and

compares identifiers read from sets of transaction cards to a corresponding stored list of identifiers to determine if transaction cards in the set have identifiers that match corresponding identifiers in the stored list.

5   6.   The system of claim 1, wherein the card presence sensor causes the card reader to read transaction cards.

       7.   The system of claim 1, wherein the plurality of transaction cards in the group is logically organized into sets of transaction cards, and the card reader reads
10   contiguous sets of transaction cards.

       8.   The system of claim 7, wherein the controller further includes a manually operated card reader, and the controller initiates a comparison of identifiers read from transaction cards in a set to the stored list of identifiers when identifiers from a first
15   transaction card and a last transaction card in the set are read using the manually operated card reader.

       9.   The system of claim 8, wherein the controller is adapted to indicate if a transaction card in the set has been misread, prompt an operator to reread the misread
20   transaction card using the manually operated card reader, and receive a reread identifier from the manually operated card reader.

       10.   The system of claim 9, wherein the controller is adapted to compare the reread identifier to the stored list of identifiers to determine if the misread transaction
25   card is appropriately located in the set.

       11.   The system of claim 7, wherein the controller further includes a transaction card counter that is adapted to count a number of transaction cards in the set.

30   12.   The system of claim 7, wherein the sets of transaction cards are sleeves of transaction cards.

13.   The system of claim 12, wherein the controller stores information regarding identification of boxes into which sleeves are packaged, and stores information regarding identification of pallets on which boxes are packaged.

14.   The system of claim 1, wherein the controller is adapted to store information regarding identifiers read from transaction cards that do not appropriately match identifiers in the stored list.

15.   The system of claim 1, wherein the stored list of identifiers includes information regarding a packaging hierarchy in which the transaction cards are to be packaged.

16.   The system of claim 15, wherein the stored list of identifiers includes information regarding in which sleeve each transaction card is to be packaged.

17.   The system of claim 16, wherein the stored list of identifiers includes information regarding at least one of a box in which each sleeve is to be packaged, a pallet on which each box is to be packaged, and a card read status for each transaction card.

18.   A method for controlling transaction card fabrication, comprising:

providing a group of fabricated transaction cards each having at least one identifier formed on the card that uniquely identifies the card from others in the group of transaction cards, the group of transaction cards being logically organized into a plurality of sets of transaction cards;

reading identifiers from the plurality of sets of transaction cards;

comparing identifiers read from transaction cards in each set to a stored list of identifiers associated with the set;

determining if the identifiers read from transaction cards in each set match corresponding identifiers in the stored list associated with the set;

generating a report that indicates a set is complete if all identifiers read from the set match a corresponding identifier in the associated stored list; and

generating a report that indicates a set is incomplete if at least one identifier read from the set does not match a corresponding identifier in the associated stored list.

19.   The method of claim 18, wherein the step of comparing identifiers comprises comparing the identifiers in a sequence in which the identifiers were read from the transaction cards in the set to a sequence of identifiers in the stored list.

20.   The method of claim 18, wherein the step of reading identifiers from the plurality of sets of cards comprises building a temporary file of identifiers read from each set of cards, and the step of comparing identifiers comprises inserting the temporary file into a database and comparing identifiers in the temporary file to the stored list associated with each set after all transaction cards in the set have been read.

21.   The method of claim 18, wherein the step of reading identifiers comprises reading identifiers from contiguous sets of transaction cards.

22.   The method of claim 18, further comprising manually reading identifiers from a first transaction card and a last transaction card in a set of transaction cards, and initiating the step of comparing identifiers read from transaction cards in the set in response to manually reading the identifiers from the first and last transaction cards in the set.

23.   The method of claim 18, further comprising indicating to an operator if a transaction card in a set has been misread to prompt the operator to reread the misread transaction card.

24.   The method of claim 23, further comprising comparing the reread identifier to the stored list of identifiers to determine if the misread transaction card is appropriately located in the set.

25.   The method of claim 18, further comprising counting the total number of transaction cards in each set of transaction cards using a counter that detects whether an appropriate number of cards is present in the set of transaction cards.

5   26.   The method of claim 18, wherein the sets of transaction cards are sleeves of transaction cards.

27.   The method of claim 26, further comprising storing information regarding identification of boxes into which sleeves are packaged, and storing information
10   regarding identification of pallets on which boxes are packaged.

28.   The method of claim 18, wherein the step of generating a report that indicates a set is incomplete comprises storing information regarding identifiers read from transaction cards that do not appropriately match identifiers in the stored list.

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29.   The method of claim 18, wherein the stored list of identifiers includes information regarding a packaging hierarchy in which the transaction cards are to be packaged.

20   30.   The method of claim 29, wherein the stored list of identifiers includes information regarding in which sleeve each transaction card is to be packaged.

31.   The method of claim 30, wherein the stored list of identifiers includes information regarding at least one of a box in which each sleeve is to be packaged, a
25   pallet on which each box is to be packaged, and a card read status for each transaction card.

32.   The method of claim 18, wherein the step of generating a report that indicates a set is complete comprises printing a label for the set that indicates the set is
30   complete and physically associating the label with a container in which the set of transaction cards is located.

33.   The method of claim 32, wherein the step of generating a report that indicates a set is complete comprises providing a tamper-evident seal on a container holding the set of transaction cards.

5   34.   A method for manufacturing transaction cards comprising:

automatically identifying a plurality of components that are to be assembled together to form at least one transaction card;

automatically verifying for each transaction card that appropriate components are to be assembled together before the components are assembled; and

10   assembling the plurality of components to form at least one transaction card after verifying that the assembled plurality of components are appropriate for assembly.

35.   The method of claim 34, wherein the step of automatically identifying comprises:

15   reading an identifier on at least one panel of sheet material used to form at least one transaction card.

36.   The method of claim 34, wherein the step of assembling comprises:

assembling two printed sheets of material together to form a single laminated

20   sheet that includes a plurality of transaction cards.

37.   A method for controlling transaction card fabrication, comprising:

(a) providing a group of fabricated transaction cards, each transaction card having at least one identifier formed on the transaction card that uniquely identifies the

25   transaction card from others in the group of transaction cards;

(b) machine reading identifiers from a set of the transaction cards, the set of transaction cards having 5 or more transaction cards and less than a total number of transaction cards in the group;

(c) physically organizing the set of transaction cards to be separately packaged

30   from other sets of transaction cards;

(d) storing the identifiers read from the corresponding set of transaction cards;

(e) repeating steps (b) through (d) for subsequent sets of transaction cards;

(f) comparing the identifiers read from the sets to a stored list of identifiers; and

(g) automatically identifying if any transaction cards in the sets are unexpected or duplicates or if there are any missing transaction cards based on the comparison of step (f).

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38.   The method of claim 37, wherein the step of comparing identifiers comprises comparing the identifiers in a sequence in which the identifiers were read from a set of transaction cards to a sequence of identifiers in the stored list.

10   39.   The method of claim 37, wherein the stored list of identifiers is established before any transaction card in the group of transaction cards is machine read.

40.   The method of claim 37, wherein the stored list of identifiers is empty before any transaction card in the group of transaction cards is machine read, and the step

15   (d) of storing identifiers comprises adding the identifiers read from the corresponding set of transaction cards to the stored list of identifiers.

41.   The method of claim 40, wherein the step (f) of comparing identifiers comprises comparing identifiers from a set of transaction cards to identifiers from

20   previously read transaction cards in the stored list.

42.   The method of claim 37, wherein the step (f) of comparing identifiers comprises manually reading identifiers from a first transaction card and a last transaction card in a set of transaction cards, and initiating a comparison of identifiers read from the

25   set of transaction cards to identifiers in the stored list in response to manually reading the identifiers from the first and last transaction cards in the set.

43.   The method of claim 37, further comprising indicating to an operator if a transaction card in a set has been misread to prompt the operator to manually reread the

30   misread transaction card.

44.   The method of claim 43, further comprising comparing the reread identifier to the stored list of identifiers to determine if the misread transaction card is appropriately located in a set.

45.   The method of claim 37, further comprising counting the total number of transaction cards in each set of transaction cards using a counter that detects the presence of cards.

46.   The method of claim 37, wherein the sets of transaction cards are sleeves of transaction cards.

47.   The method of claim 46, further comprising storing information regarding identification of boxes into which sleeves are packaged, and storing information regarding identification of pallets on which boxes are packaged.

48.   The method of claim 37, wherein the step (g) of automatically identifying comprises generating a report that indicates a set is incomplete.

49.   The method of claim 37, wherein the stored list of identifiers includes information regarding a packaging hierarchy in which the transaction cards are to be packaged.

50.   The method of claim 49, wherein the stored list of identifiers includes information regarding in which sleeve each transaction card is to be packaged.

51.   The method of claim 50, wherein the stored list of identifiers includes information regarding at least one of a box in which each sleeve is to be packaged, a pallet on which each box is to be packaged, and a card read status for each transaction card.

52.   The method of claim 37, further comprising generating a report that indicates a set is complete by printing a label for the set that indicates the set is complete

and physically associating the label with a container in which the set of transaction cards is located.

53.   The method of claim 52, wherein the step of generating a report that indicates a set is complete comprises providing a tamper-evident seal on a container holding the set of transaction cards.

54.   The method of claim 37, wherein the stored list of identifiers includes two identifiers for each transaction card, each transaction card in the group having a unique association of two identifiers formed on the card.

55.   A method for processing transaction items, comprising:

(a) moving a first transaction card along a path;

(b) performing a first operation on the first transaction card that alters the first transaction card, the first operation, when properly performed, forming information on the first transaction card and causing the first transaction card to be uniquely identified from other transaction cards in a group of processed transaction cards;

(c) detecting information indicative of whether the first operation was properly performed on the first transaction card;

(d) automatically remaking the first transaction card if the first operation was improperly performed on the first transaction card before making a next transaction card so that the set of processed transaction cards is created in a specific sequence;

(e) repeating steps (a) through (d) so as to provide a group of transaction cards, each transaction card having at least one identifier formed on the transaction card that uniquely identifies the transaction card from others in the group of transaction cards;

(f) machine reading identifiers from a set of the transaction cards, the set of transaction cards having 5 or more transaction cards and less than a total number of transaction cards in the group;

(g) physically organizing the set of transaction cards to be separately packaged from other sets of transaction cards;

(h) storing the identifiers read from the corresponding set of transaction cards;

(i) repeating steps (f) through (h) for subsequent sets of transaction cards;

(j) comparing the identifiers read from the sets to a stored list of identifiers; and

(k) automatically identifying if any transaction cards in the sets are duplicates or if there are any missing transaction cards based on the comparison of step (j).

56.   A method for controlling transaction card fabrication, comprising:

(a) providing a group of transaction cards, each transaction card having a first identifier formed on the transaction card;

(b) forming a second identifier on each of the transaction cards so each transaction card has at least two identifiers associated with the transaction card and is uniquely identified from all others in the group of transaction cards;

(c) machine reading identifiers from the transaction cards; and

(d) storing the identifiers read from the transaction cards.